



# the presbyterian banner

August 2011

*I know that the LORD is great,  
that our Lord is greater than all gods.  
The LORD does what whatever pleases him,  
in the heavens and on the earth,  
in the seas and all their depths.*

*Psalm 135:5-6*

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ISSN 0729-3542

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Subscriptions for 2011  
11 Issues per year (Note new prices)  
*Within Australia*: \$35 [Bulk \$30]  
*Overseas*: AU \$50 Airmail.

Direct Credit :  
Bendigo (BSB) 633000  
A/C No. 140124082

## Editorial

Having come over from the continental Reformed strand of Calvinism to the English Presbyterian one, I have noticed a number of differences. Mind you, they are not fundamental differences. If anything, I am finding out more about how much those essentials have remained. Rather, I am thinking here of a number of peripheral aspects, usually practical details.

One of these concerns the clock that is found in Presbyterian churches. I'm not used to having a clock at all within a Reformed church worship area, but it is found in quite a prominent position in all the Presbyterian churches I have had the privilege of either visiting or leading worship services in. And which position might that be in, I ask you? Well, not anywhere where any of the congregation can have a quick look to see how long the sermon has gone on, because it is over the entry /exit door to and from the worship area. From what I can work out, the only one who has a clear view of it is the minister.

Now, why would that be? Is it so that the minister is reminded not to go over a certain time allotted for worship? I like what one minister apparently replied after an elder had asked the Lord's blessing upon the hour of worship before the service. In response to that prayer he said, 'Do you think it's right to limit the Lord like that?' Obviously, he wasn't going to pay attention to the clock above the door in the worship area!

And believe me, they can be quite big clocks too! The one in the heritage-listed South Yarra Presbyterian Church (originally a 'free' church, I was told) is huge! The minister leading the service there couldn't help being vividly confronted by the time he'd been in the pulpit.

Mind you, there was one time a minister in a Reformed Church could have done with a clock facing him from the back wall. You see, his own watch had stopped. And so he went on and on and on and on... He went past the 20 minute mark, the 30 minute mark, the 40 minute mark, and over the hour. Then he must have realised he'd been preaching for longer than usual because he turned and asked the organist how long he'd been going for. 'Oh, long enough, Dominee,' came the clear reply. And so, he quickly finished his sermon.

It would be a pity if any of our ministers didn't have a clear enough structure in their sermons not to realise when to come to an end – it wouldn't be nice if any of us was given the nick-name, 'The Never-ended Reverend.' But, by the same token, may we always be faithful to the text so that we dig deeply into it and feed it out bountifully to God's people.

*To love to preach is one thing –  
to love those to whom we preach, quite another.*

Richard Cecil

*Photo Credit: Kylie Buck, 'A Pakenham Garden'*

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## 'Lost in the Church'

### Considering Romans 2: 17—29

George Ball

Imagine a courtroom scene. That's the picture in these opening chapters of Romans. The judge is God. The apostle Paul is the interrogator – God's prosecuting attorney. The first defendant to be cross-examined by the apostle is the pagan Gentile world (Rom. 1: 18-32). The second defendant to be examined is the decent, upright, respectable, moral Gentile (Rom. 2: 1-16). With accuracy and precision Paul exposes the spiritual and moral guilt of both parties. Such a finding was music in the ears of the religious Jew. You can almost hear them applaud from the gallery. It only confirmed what they had always known! 'There's no such thing as a good Gentile'. As far as the Jew was concerned, the world was divided in two – into Jews and Gentiles – the 'clean' and 'unclean'. The Jews were God's chosen people. Gentiles were fodder for hell. The Jews however are in for a shock. They are now called to the witness box (Rom. 2: 17-29). Paul turns the spotlight on them – and conducts a probing cross-examination of their faith and practice. By the end of the examination he will have exposed their misplaced confidence and rendered them, too, guilty before God.

As we imagine this courtroom scene, Paul is interacting with an imaginary Jewish representative. He knew how a self-righteous Jew thought, for he had been one himself. Indeed, it may be that Paul is having a debate with himself. Let's imagine then that Paul is using the technique of talking with his 'old self' in order to get behind the defences of the religious Jew.

#### 1. Paul the Pharisee

Paul lists the assets and advantages of the Jew – things that every Jew was proud of (Rom. 2:17-20). These are:

- The Jew was proud to bear the name 'Jew' (it means 'praise'). They assumed they received praise from God. (2:29b);
- The Jew was proud of the fact that they were the custodians of the law;
- The Jew could boast of his relationship with God: they were God's special people'
- The Jew could boast he had knowledge of God's will. They had the commandments. They had the scriptures. They held the key of knowledge;
- The Jew was proud of the fact that no

other nation had such privileges.

The apostle then asks a number of pointed and searching questions designed to prick their conscience and unmask their hypocrisy (Rom. 2:21-24). 'Do you practice what you preach? You teach that people should not steal – do you steal? You speak against adultery – do you commit adultery? You are opposed to idolatry – do you rob temples? You brag about the law – but do you not break it?'

He then draws a damning conclusion (2:24). Instead of the Jews being a witness to the Gentiles, Paul declares that, 'God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you' (quoting from Isaiah). The pagan Gentiles who did business with the Jews were not fooled by the Jew's devotion to the Law. The Jews had brought the name of God into disrepute. You can imagine many of the Gentiles saying: 'If that's the way you do business – I want nothing of your religion!'

Paul proceeds to undermine their misplaced confidence in circumcision – something which was very precious to them (Rom. 2:25-29). Circumcision had a magical and mystical quality about it. They had come to regard circumcision as a guarantee of God's favour. They believed that if you were circumcised you were 'home and hosed'. To quote the Rabbis – 'God swore to Abraham that no one who was circumcised should be sent to hell.' It was further taught that, 'Abraham sits before the gates of hell and does not allow any circumcised Israelite to enter there.'

Paul makes it clear that the true sign of belonging to God is not an outward mark on the physical body, but the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit within – what he means by 'circumcision of the heart' (2:29). This must have come as something of a shock to the Jews.

If I have managed to retain your interest so far (and I congratulate if you have) you may be wondering, 'what's the relevance of this passage for us now?' 'All this talk about ancient Israel, and the law, and circumcision is hardly riveting stuff! Isn't this passage only for the historian and for those who like to live in the past?'

I will try to show you that this passage is very relevant to us in the year 2011. This passage is for religious, church-going, Bible-loving people. This passage is for members of the Church. This passage is for people who have a long and proud pedigree. This passage is for people who feel very secure and satisfied in their tradition. This passage is for those who perhaps feel a cut above the rest! This passage is for us in the P.C.E.A. This passage could equally apply to the Anglicans or the Catholics or the Baptists, or indeed anyone proud of their church.

To see how this passage applies to us, let's read the passage again. Except this time we shall replace 'Presbyterian' for 'Jew', and 'baptism' for 'circumcision' ... and see the result! This time we meet – not Paul the Pharisee – but Phil the Presbyterian.

#### 2. Phil the Presbyterian

Meet Phil. He's a Presbyterian – fourth generation. His forbears were Free Church stock from Scotland. His father and grandfather were both elders in the 'Kirk'. Phil was baptised by the saintly Rev. Dr. Donald Cameron – who was one time Moderator of the Assembly. He was a great man! (The men today don't seem to be in the same league!). Phil was baptised in the gown that his mother was baptised in. The gown was kept so that Phil's children were also baptised in it ... Phil still has the Bible presented to him at his baptism that was signed by Dr. Cameron. He also has a 'big Bible' in the house that his parents stored and passed down to him. Phil is very regular at church. Sadly, his children no longer attend. Phil has seldom missed a communion and he enjoys singing the 'old' psalms. Phil has been Presbyterian all his life – he wouldn't dream of changing now! As far as he is concerned, there is no other church to compare. The Anglicans are a mixed bunch – some good, some not so good! The Baptists too are a mixture – used to be better than they are now. As for the Uniting, they have gone off the rails entirely! It's only in the Presbyterians that you still get a good 40-minute sermon! It's only the Presbyterians who talk about

the Sabbath. You wouldn't see Phil in the shopping centre on Sunday or cutting the grass at home. Indeed, he laments the changes seen in his life-time – he remembers fondly the time when the shops used to be closed on a Sunday.

Like Paul the Pharisee, Phil also has a great heritage. He started life with many advantages. He was born into a Christian home; he was baptised; he attended Sunday school; he learned the Shorter Catechism; he was taught the Bible; he heard the gospel from an early age; he was part of a good church. These are all very great privileges. But never think that any of these things make you a Christian, any more than being born in a garage makes you a car. You can be a Presbyterian and not a Christian. You can be a Christian and not a Presbyterian. (Though I think myself it's best to be both)!

There are some things about Phil that ring alarm bells:

**The first is his use (or lack of use) of the Bible.** Despite owning a number of Bibles – it doesn't seem to do much for him. He only reads the Bible occasionally. It doesn't search him or convict him as Psalm 139 describes. It doesn't challenge him or even distress him. What the psalmist says in Psalm 119; 'How I love your law... My heart trembles at it,' is something foreign. Phil is quite satisfied with what he hears in church.

I once read the Diary of a Bible (it could have been Phil's).

**Jan. 15** Been resting for a week. A few nights after the first of the year my owner opened me, but no more. Another New Year's resolution gone wrong.

**Feb. 3** Owner picked me up and rushed off to church.

**Feb. 13** Cleaning day – dusted and put back in my place.

**April 2** Busy day. Owner had to present the lesson at church – quickly looked up a lot of references.

**May 20** Baby born. They wrote his name on one of my pages.

**July 1** Packed in a suitcase – off for vacation.

**July 20** Still in the suitcase. Almost everything else taken out.

**July 25** Home again. Quite a journey, though I don't see why I went.

**Aug. 16** Cleaned again and put in prominent place – the minister to be here for dinner.

**Oct. 20** Owner wrote Grandma's death in my family record. Left his pair of glasses between my pages.

**Dec. 31** Owner just found his glasses. Wonder if he'll make any resolutions about me for the New Year?

If your Bible could talk – what kind of story would it tell?

**The second alarming thing about Phil is that his practice doesn't match his profession.** He doesn't walk the talk! He is constantly running other people down; he hates Muslims and Catholics; he is known to have a short fuse; and thinks nothing of leaving work early, or taking a 'sickie' when he has other things he wants to do. Those at work see through Phil and have no respect for him or his church. Phil loves watching T.V. In fact, the TV hardly cools down! His favourite programmes include 'Desperate Housewives' and 'Dancing with the Stars.' Phil is a bag of contradictions.

**Another alarming thing about Phil is that he thinks he is OK with God because he is a church member, has been baptised and takes communion.** As far as Phil is concerned, it's his passport to heaven. Phil says, 'I have a deep faith. I thank God for my parents bringing me up a good Christian and I rely on my faith. You have to believe in something – it's very important.'

Poor Phil. He, like Paul the Pharisee, fails the test: he too is under the judgement of God. He misunderstands the nature of true religion. Churchianity is not Christianity. As one writer puts it, 'Religion is a failure: the plain fact is that religious activity cannot save you. Candles and confessions; invocations and incense; wine and wafers; services and sacraments; sprinkling and sacrifices – none of them can remove sin or reconcile you to God.'

There are too many people today who are religious but not regenerate. They have a church but not Christ, they have ritual but not redemption. Phil's religion is a failure. What then is true religion? Where have Paul and Phil gone wrong? What is it that makes a Christian?

God requires a genuine, inward, secret work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, whether we are Jew or Gentile; whether we are Paul or Phil (see Psalm 51: 10 and John 3: 3, 5). The apostle writes, 'real circumcision is circumcision of the heart by the Spirit.' (Rom. 2:29). Jesus said, 'You

must be born again!' If we are to receive praise and favour from God, we must be born of the Spirit of God.

### 3. Chris the Christian

(Rom.2:29)

Meet Chris. He is a Christian. He has entered into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ (just as the apostle did when he met Jesus on the Damascus road). He has been born again and has become a member of the church.

Though Chris had been baptised as a child, he knew that it didn't save him. He knew that he must 'improve' his baptism. He knew that he must do something about it. He knew he was not right with God. He knew he needed the cleansing and the promises that baptism pointed to. He knew he needed the genuine faith of his parents. So Chris faced up to it; and did what he knew had to be done. He got down on his knees and prayed these words; 'Dear God, I know that I have sinned against you and am not worthy to be accepted by you. I am guilty of rebelling against you and ignoring you. I need your forgiveness. Thank you for Jesus. I believe that Jesus came to save me and give me new life. Please forgive and change me that I may live with you forever. Amen.' The Lord heard his prayer! Chris' life was changed – inside out! His family noticed the change, his mates saw the change and at work Chris' dedication resulted in promotion. His employers don't want to lose him. Chris is a good witness at work – and he has invited a couple to come with him to the next guest service in church. That's the kind of life that receives praise from God. It's only by trusting in Jesus Christ alone for salvation and seeking to live a life worthy of our profession that brings any pleasure to God. (Oh, and by the way, Chris is also a Presbyterian.)

# Life under the Banner

## *Filled with Spirits, or Filled with the Spirit (II)*

Jim Klazinga

Alcohol is not evil in and of itself. But the abuse of alcohol is a sin. Drunkenness is a manifestation of the darkness of sin.

Contrasted with the darkness of sin is the light of the Spirit-filled life. The life of the drunkard and life in Christ are diametrically opposed to each other. This contrast is made clear in Ephesians 5:18 - 'And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.'

To show how much conflict there is between life in the Spirit and a life dominated by alcohol, let's compare and contrast these two different kinds of life. In recognizing this conflict, we will further be able to see and understand some of the important differences between being a child of light and being a child of darkness. We will be able to see how the Christian and the non-Christian life are completely opposed to one another.

By the way, for identifying many of these contrasts, I am in debt to the 20th century preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who lists them in his extensive commentary series on Ephesians.

### **A Life under Control**

First of all, we see the difference between the booze-filled life and the Spirit-filled life in that the Christian life is a

controlled life, while the alcohol-filled life is basically uncontrolled. Ephesians 5:18 spells this out specifically: 'And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery.' The Greek word translated 'debauchery' has in it the idea of wantonness, excess, riot. Drunkenness leads to riotous living and to one flinging himself wholeheartedly into all sorts of sinfulness. It is essentially uncontrolled.

'Live fast, die young' is a common

ideal in our drunken society. Sadly, people seem to find this way of thinking attractive and exciting. But really, there's nothing good about it. It is destructive. It is a life that can only lead to death.

'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.' In light of Ephesians 5:18, this statement could be rephrased: 'Eat and drink to excess, and as a result, tomorrow you may very well die.'

This sort of life is incompatible with the Christian life. The Christian life does not lead one on the path to destruction, but on the path to life. It is a life of celebration, but in a controlled way.

The Christian life is not one of uncontrolled, unbridled intoxicating passion. It is a life of maturity. The darkness-filled drunk loses his inhibitions, but the Christian knows that one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control.

As we read in Titus 1:7,8, a passage that talks specifically about elders, but which contains ideals all of us should



strive after: 'For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.'

Another comparison: the Christian life is productive, while the dark, drunken life is wasteful. The Christian seeks to build up, not break down.

You see it with many parties where

the booze flows freely: the homes where these parties are held are trashed, windows are broken, walls are banged in, and furniture is destroyed. This is not consistent with what the Christian life is all about. The Spirit-filled person seeks to be fruitful. He desires to build up his fellow believers. He wants to do his work in a constructive manner to the glory of God. The drunken partier is obsessed with consuming simply for the sake of consuming; wanting more and more, wasting more and more. The Spirit-filled Christian wants to produce: produce peace, produce joy, produce life.

On to another comparison: the Spirit-filled life is energizing, whereas the drunken life is exhausting. The Spirit-filled person should wake up in the morning renewed, hoping that the day before him will be another day in which to serve the Lord. The drunken person doesn't want to wake up. He wants the world to go away. His destructive life-style

wears down his body. It makes him weak, it gives him headaches, it wears his bones.

The Spirit of God does not have this kind of effect. He does not take away strength; He gives it. Oh, perhaps not

the kind of physical strength that enables one to lift weights and run marathons. The Spirit-filled Christian is not necessarily going to be a body builder with protracted muscles. He is not one who never gets tired. If he has a particularly grueling day, he may very well wake up the next day with sore muscles.

But the Spirit does provide an inner strength that nothing can take away. The Christian has a strength of soul

that enables him to face each day, knowing that the Lord is watching over him, knowing that the promises of God will not fail. As we read in Psalm 46:1-5 - 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.'

If the drunkard were to feel the mountains quake, he would go running for his bottle. Does he have a strength that allows him to say, 'I will not fall!?' Is he truly able to say, 'I will not fear!?' If anything, alcohol makes one paranoid. If anything, it makes one fall!

### **A Life of Joy**

Another important comparison between the Spirit-filled life and the life of drunkenness: The Spirit filled life is a life filled with joy; the drunken life is filled with misery. Contrary to what many people seem to think, contrary to the false witness the world proclaims about us, the Spirit-filled life is not one characterized by somberness, unhappiness and misery.

True, the Christian is unhappy about his sin. He should be! But at the same time, he is filled with a joy that passes all understanding because of how he has been saved through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Oh, the world looks at the Christian thinking, 'Look at him, always miserable, not allowed to do this, not allowed to do that, never having any fun. But look at me! I'm enjoying myself! I'm letting go of all my inhibitions. I'm doing what I want to do and

not letting anyone stop me from having a good time. 'Party hearty' is my motto!

But where does his good time lead to? It leads to marital breakdowns. It leads to liver breakdown. It leads to headaches. It leads to misery. Does he really delude himself into thinking he is having more fun than the believer? Does he really think that he is actually escaping from all his problems? Does he think that his loneliness, his misery, is not going to be there the next morning? If anything, his problems will be worse, and he will be further down the path of destruction.

But the Christian knows true joy. As in John 15:11 - 'These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.' So that our joy may be complete. Joy is the fruit of the Spirit. The Christian knows a joy that nothing can take away. It will be there on the morning after and for all eternity. The Spirit-filled believer hears the command of God: 'Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, rejoice' and he knows he can rejoice, because of what Christ has done for him. The drunk has no real cause for rejoicing. Ultimately, he can only fear.

Another difference between the alcohol-filled life and the Spirit-filled life: the Spirit leads to true fellowship, whereas the abuse of alcohol leads to destroyed relationships. The Spirit-filled believer knows what it means to be a part of a body. He knows that he shares a faith and a love with those who are joined to Christ along with him. The drunkard may think he is the life of the party, but his so-called friends are not helping him. They are only having fun at his expense. But the Spirit-filled Christian truly knows what it means to truly belong to a community.

To sum up, the dark, alcohol-filled life is negative in every respect; it is the road which leads to death. But the Spirit-filled life is positive in every respect; it is the road which leads to life.

Is it not clear that there is nothing in common between light and darkness, between belief and unbelief, between the life of drunkenness and the Spirit-filled life? Is it not obvious that the Spirit-filled life is far superior to anything the world can offer us?

My friend, are you trying to find your pleasures in darkness? Do you reach for false comfort in booze? Or do you search after righteousness? Do you thirst after the living water of Jesus Christ?

If you struggle with the sin of alcohol abuse, please, do everything you can to flee from it. Recognize it as one of the results of the fall into sin. Repent of it. Look to the Lord Jesus Christ for your strength. And seek out assistance from caring, Spirit-filled believers who want to help you. Please remember that in drunkenness, as with any form of darkness, you will never be able to escape your pain. But in Jesus Christ, there is forgiveness and restoration. There is hope.

By the way, if drunkenness is not a problem for you, this does not give you permission to look down on the one for whom it is a struggle. No doubt you have your own particular form of darkness that you struggle with. May we all seek to work together to fight against darkness, however it manifests itself. May God fill each of us with His Spirit, that together we may know true joy, true peace, and true life.

Was this space for your church news and photographs?

*Ask your minister or elder how your congregation can be part of this positive promotion of the denomination, as well as keeping the rest of us up with what's happening!*

*Camps, special events, youth news, seniors, engagements, marriages, births, anniversaries, obituaries... the list goes on and on!*

*Perhaps you could volunteer to send in some news and photos?*

# The Past for Today

John Dunmore Lang—Turbulent Scot, Presbyterian Republican (2) Rowland S. Ward

*In this second article about the first Presbyterian minister in New South Wales (then including what is now Victoria (to 1851) and Queensland (to 1859), we look at Lang's relations with the Presbyterian Church*

## Lang and the Presbyterian Church

The Presbytery of New South Wales (which then included what is now Victoria and Queensland) was formed on 14 December 1832 despite the intemperate habits of two of the ministers, and the opposition of John McGarvie, who had turned out to be a Scottish Moderate. This Presbytery ordained a minister for Launceston and in turn the Presbytery of Van Diemen's Land was constituted on 6 November 1835 by Lang and two others.

The Presbytery in New South Wales had a number of unsuitable ministers. Lang determined on a further visit to Britain in 1836, securing about 20 men from the Church of Scotland and from the Synod of Ulster. Lang had a pre-arranged plan to set up a rival church court to the Presbytery. When he returned in 1837 he found that a Temporalities Act to regulate the temporal affairs of the Presbytery had been secured from the Government, the terms of which made the Presbytery the only legal representative of the Church of Scotland in the colony. The Presbytery Moderator's certificate was necessary for payment of stipends under the Church Act. Lang thereupon represented the Temporalities Act as 'monstrous and disgraceful in the highest degree' and having the effect of forcing him and his supporters out. This was complete fabrication, but Lang and five of the new recruits joined in constituting a Synod on 11 December 1837. Lang placed men in the same localities as Presbytery ministers to draw off adherents and drive out the drunkards. A full-blown schism operated until union was effected in 1840.

The Presbytery expelled Lang for schism on 18 January 1838. Lang

used *The Colonist* to spread contention. As James Forbes put it, 'week after week he poured forth volleys of abuse against the Presbytery, unequalled for satanic bitterness and vulgar scurrility, by the worst of the London Sunday papers.' Lang went on a further trip to Britain and America 1839-41. In his absence terms of union were agreed and the union, em-



Lang in later years

bracing about 18 ministers, was consummated on 5 October 1840 under the name 'Synod of Australia in connection with the Established Church of Scotland.' The Basis did not give the Church of Scotland any legislative or judicial jurisdiction, but the Synod was committed to the same doctrinal basis as the Church of Scotland. Presbyteries were created subject to the Synod. Lang was admitted on his return in March 1841.

## Church and State

In 1840 Lang published a substantial volume entitled *Religion and Education in America* in which he advocated

support of churches by voluntary givings rather than the State, and went so far as to advocate no connection between Church and State. This conflicted with the official views of the Church of Scotland as set out in the Confession of Faith, which can be summarised thus: (1) Church and State are distinct and separate institutions, both being accountable to the Lord Jesus Christ who has received all authority in heaven and earth from the Father; (2) the mutually helpful relationship between Church and State does not imply subordination of one to the other in its own sphere; and, in particular, the civil authorities have no jurisdiction or authoritative control in the spiritual affairs of Christ's Church. (3) In maintaining these Scriptural principles, and the ideal of a united Christian Church in a Christian nation, the Church does not regard the involvement of the State in matters concerning religion as *ipso facto* contrary to liberty of conscience. Rather, she rejects intolerance or persecution as methods of advancing the kingdom of God, and recognises the individual's liberty of conscience and the right of private judgement.

## Lang's character

Lang's views brought opposition from many including some who had previously supported him. Lang's repute had already declined in Scotland. When he was censured for allowing to preach in Scot's Church a Congregational minister who had been rejected by the Synod, he reacted negatively. On 6 February 1842 he told his congregation that he would go to New Zealand and be supported by voluntary givings. In an extraordinary blast of invective, and alluding to the narrative of Joshua 6:20ff, he said that the Australian church could not prosper until she renounced with indignant scorn the *Babylonish garment* of an infidel establishment of religion and abandoned the wedge of gold that corrupted all who touched it. At length

the bulk of the 500 adults in his congregation agreed to sever all connection with the Synod and with the State, and he consented to remain. On 8 October 1842 the Synod deposed Lang for slander - calling the Synod a synagogue of Satan particularly displeased the brethren – and for his divisive courses and contumacy. This was by an 8-4 vote. Ultimately, on 9 September 1851, the Presbytery of Irvine in Scotland declared Lang no longer a minister of the Church of Scotland. They did not tell Lang what was afoot nor give him an opportunity to defend himself. Lang tried with minimal success to start a new body. In July 1846 he set off again for Britain, returning in March 1850. He and two other ministers set up the Synod of New South Wales (the second of this name) on 3 April 1850, although the minutes term it *The Australian Presbyterian Church*. During its life of some 14 years, 31 ministers were connected with it at one time or another, including 8 of the 20 brought out by Lang in 1850. Its approach was very loose. Some have regarded it as an attempt to establish a comprehensive evangelical Protestant body, but it appears more an attempt by Lang to maintain a useful power base and his own ego. There were four ministers (including Lang) connected with it in November 1864.

Lang was out of the mainstream from 1842, but his political influence was such that he had to be accommodated if union of the three Presbyterian streams was to be achieved. The original Synod of Australia did not wish to recognise Lang, despite having to recall the deposition in 1863 (which was done by a majority of one vote) after Lang secured the reversal of the Presbytery of Irvine's sentence in 1861. Lang's Synod lost its identity by being merged on 15 November 1864 with the majority of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, to form a General Synod which then merged with the original Synod of Australia to form the *Presbyterian Church of New South Wales* on 8 September 1865 with 47 ministers. In 1872 Lang was chosen Moderator of the Assembly but used his speech to seriously criticise his

brethren for not choosing him earlier! There wasn't too much mellowing as he grew older. As a churchman Lang was wilful, egotistical and not respectable (twice jailed for libel). He 'preached more of the Gospel than he practised', someone quipped. From the Presbyterian viewpoint Lang is therefore something of an ambiguous figure. James

Forbes, writing in 1846 about the 1837 period, stated: '...it has ever appeared to us one of the most mysterious permissions of Divine Providence, that the founding of an infant church in an infant colony should have fallen into such hands.'

Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

## FAMILY CAMP

at

Naamaroo Conference Centre,  
Lady Game Drive  
Chatswood, NSW

3 pm Tuesday 3rd January to  
2 pm Friday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2012 (DV)

*Preliminary theme: Warnings and Encouragements  
from the Book of Ezekiel*

Main Speaker: Rev. Rowland Ward

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camp commences.



# The World in the Banner

## Fierce debate on a religious matter

The Spectator hosted a debate at the Royal Geographic Society yesterday evening with a rather meaty motion: 'Secularism is a greater threat to Christianity than Islam.' The debate was marked by a highly personal level of investment from the speakers, a sudden swing in the vote, and the uncharacteristic sight of Chair Rod Liddle acting as the most conciliatory person in the room. Although the debate ranged far and wide, at its heart was an old-fashioned contest between traditionalists interested in the cultural hinterland in which society changes, and rationalists who use the calculus of terrorism statistics and murder rates. Liddle introduced Damian Thompson as further to the Right than a fishknife.' But when Thompson's opponent for the night, Douglas Murray, was introduced as the only possible speaker who might outflank him on the Right, it was a reminder of just how many attitudes can fall under the label of 'Right wing' nowadays.

The Reverend Timothy Radcliffe OP opened for the motion. To Radcliffe, Christianity is not threatened by attempts to separate Church and State. The current and previous governments, he added wryly, both made regular announcements about the importance of faith involvement in community. Rather, Christianity is threatened by fundamentalist secularism, which argues that the only valid truths are scientific. Christianity, Radcliffe claimed, has never excluded science. Indeed, St Albert the Great insisted on testing every hypothesis concerning nature that he encountered, even carrying around an iron bar with him to test on every passing ostrich the claim that an ostrich could ingest iron. By contrast, 'secularism, by definition, makes totalitarian claims – only a Communist dictator could come up with a phrase that his writers could 'engineer the soul.'

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, a convert from Islam and Anglican bishop, opposed. He drew on his own experience of persecution in Pakistan, and his understanding of Islamic history. 'Never and nowhere has secularism de-

stroyed Christianity, but the same cannot be said for Islam.' Moving with familiarity through a rapid range of examples, he paid particular attention to the Muslim conquest of Syria in 635–8. Notorious for its prescription of the death penalty for apostates, 'Islam is unique among world religions on the pressure it exerts on other faiths'. Unlike Christianity, Islam legislates for all areas of public and 'secular' life, Sookhdeo noted. And even in the 21st century, we have seen Islamic aggression: in Smyrna, Assyria, the Armenian genocide, the Sudanese civil war and the decimation of the Christian population in Iraq. Only in an Islamic state could Asia Bibi find herself on Death Row, two of her most prominent political defenders murdered. Damian Thompson began his response by praising Sookhdeo's support for persecuted Christians. He was clear in his condemnation of Christians who fail to confront Islam, or to defend their faith. But he argued that Christian timidity can be directly attributed to the fact that Western Christianity itself has become secularised. The Church of England, even the Catholic Church, has become infected by relativism, while Christians who defend 'unfashionable' or socially conservative viewpoints find their cultural reference points eroded by social scorn and religious illiteracy. The Spectator blogger and Observer columnist Nick Cohen gave a secular defence of the Enlightenment. He also attempted to draw together the disparate strands of the debate that had at times focused on Western religion, at times on Developing World religion. 'Christianity in the West has been made temperate by the Enlightenment.' but the same is true neither of Islam, nor of Christianity in the wider world. Rejecting Father Radcliffe's definition of 'fundamentalist secularism', Cohen argued that secularism chiefly seeks to establish a framework for pluralism. 'It is the only way for multiculturalism — and therefore the only way that people born into religious communities can have access to new ideas.'

For Tariq Ramadan, Cohen's insistence on scepticism typified the arro-

gance of secularists 'who are dogmatic about the superiority of doubt'. Ramadan insisted upon the diversity of interpretations of Islam, arguing that reductionist descriptions of Islam by its opponents only increase tension and conflict. Many of the most oppressive tactics by Muslim dictatorships, he noted, have been supported by Western, secular patron-states. But at the highest levels, Christian leaders recognise that Muslims share their concerns about the soullessness of modern society, and the need to put the challenge of difficult ethical questions at the heart of our spiritual lives.

Douglas Murray retorted that he'd recently been asked if, seeing Ramadan so often at the same debates, there was a danger they might become friends. 'No way!' Murray passionately condemned the claim that the social pressures exerted on Christians by Western secularists can be compared to persecution in the Islamic world, reeling off a sobering list of incidents of Islamic violence monitored in the last fortnight alone. Even in Britain, Muslims risk death for opting out of the communities into which they are born — secularists may be aggressive, but they have never blown up British buildings. Murray even reminded the audience of Pope Benedict's Regensburg address: 'It was a lecture that mainly attacked secularism, but not one secularist made a violent threat in response. There was one throw-away line about Islam, and within days, a nun had been killed in reprisal in Somalia.' The debate, already heated, became particularly fierce at this point. Douglas Murray's attack on 'Western Christians who ignore the plight of Catholics in Pakistan but complain about nasty anti-Catholic jibes at the dinner table' earned a complaint from Thompson: "Nothing in my life has ever been so misrepresented." Thompson was still expressing his disappointment on Twitter several hours later. But underlying the spat was a genuine and intriguing difference of approach. For all the speakers in the

affirmative, secularism was perceived as a threat because it eroded the vocabulary of faith, disconnecting contemporary culture from the aesthetics of Christian meaning. So is killing a culture as absolute as killing a human being? Not for Murray and Cohen, but perhaps for some of the audience. And that audience, including many regular Coffee Housers, was in top form. Questions ranged from the nature of evil to the practicalities of evangelism. Meanwhile, Dr Sookhdeo took Professor Ramadan to task on his description of a liberal 'amorphous' Islam, challenging him to name a secular or Christian country that executed converts. And just when it seemed that the debate would stretch to whole new horizons ('China!' interjected Father Radcliffe, 'we haven't talked about China!'), it was time for the results of the vote.

Before the debate:

For: 137

Against: 67

Abstain: 92

After the debate:

For: 108

Against: 167

Abstain: 8

+ *Kate Maltby in 'The Spectator', 30/6/2011, www.spectator.co.uk*

### **World Vision Beijing Office Pressures Shouwang Church Member Employee to Quit Job**

After the government of the Peoples Republic of China in April 2011 evicted the Shouwang Church from its leased meeting space, the church members began holding worship services outdoors in defiance of the Chinese government's intention to shut down the church. One of the Shouwang Church members is Sister Xia Xiaoqiu, who additionally is an employee of the Beijing, China, office of World Vision.

The Beijing World Vision office is now pressuring Sister Xia Xiaoqiu to resign her position after telling Xiaoqiu that '...the problems of your personal faith affect our work and our organization's development in China.'

A petition of support for the Shouwang Church is available at: <http://www.helpsw.org/p/helpshouwang.html>

+ *Betty Chu, Coordinator, HelpShouwang@gmail.com*

+ *World Vision, info@worldvision.org*

### **Robert H. Schuller Voted Off Crystal Cathedral Board of Directors**

A 3 July 2011 article by Deepa Bharath in the Orange County Register titled 'Schuller Ousted from Crystal Cathedral Board' reports that the Rev. Robert H. Schuller has been voted off the Crystal Cathedral (CC Reformed Church in America) board after trying to expand the size of the board to include other than paid CC staff members that hold a majority on the board. Schuller's son the Rev. Robert A. Schuller, who himself was ousted three years ago from the position of CC senior pastor, said that paid staff members dominating the board is a 'serious conflict of interest'.

The CC filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in October 2010, owing US\$7.5 million to unsecured creditors.

+ *Orange County Register, thorne@ocregister.com*

+ *Reformed Church of America, questions@rca.org*

### **A 'Plain Jane' congregation?**

When we would have new members join us we would tell them it's sort of a vanilla type church, as we called it. We didn't try to do anything super duper. We didn't have fancy programs or something for everybody and our view was that as far as families went (we had a number of single people in the church too) they were better served by trying to practice godliness in their own home rather than dragging themselves off to church all the time for some activity. So, because of that we put the emphasis on the preaching and teaching of the Word, so we had morning and evening services on the Lord's day. But we didn't have a whole lot of other stuff. Various people in the church would have Bible studies, there was a women's bible study and so on, but we didn't push people, we didn't say you need to be involved in this and this and this. We placed the emphasis on preaching and teaching and public worship and then let the other things fall where they might, and according to people's time and so on. But we didn't try to press a great degree of them needing to be hyper involved in church activities. Sometimes, at least in American situations it can break up families and divide families, by just being too busy with the church. So we didn't try to

hyper program anything and that sort of thing. So that's kind of what it was, it was just kind of a 'Plain Jane' congregation and if you didn't like the preaching and teaching of the Word well you should go somewhere else.

+ *Except of interview with Dale Ralph David, kec.kcc.org.au*

### **Marriage Reduces Child Poverty by Two-Thirds**

Family Research Council's Marriage and Religion Research Institute (MARRI) released a synthesis paper showing that economic well-being in the United States is strongly related to marriage. The paper, entitled Marriage and Economic Well-Being, shows that married couples are better off economically than persons in any other family structure. The paper reports that only 5.8 percent of married families were living in poverty in 2009. MARRI Director Pat Fagan, Ph.D., said: 'This research clearly documents why marriage is an important and fundamental part of society. Having the security of marriage in which to foster children is vital to reducing reliance on government welfare programs which cost taxpayers at least \$112 billion annually.' Despite the disastrous effects of divorce on society, remarriage can have positive economic impacts on broken families. Remarriage tends to increase income and restore some lost wealth. The rate of poverty among children whose mothers remarry after divorce is reduced by 66 percent.

Family First Comment: You won't hear the NZ Child Poverty Action Group mentioning the 'm' word! Sadly, the UK version of the CPAG even attacked the Conservative party when they suggested tax breaks for marriage, saying: 'Tax breaks for marriage would squander resources needed to end child poverty.' The 2009 report 'The Value of Family – Fiscal Benefits of Marriage and Reducing Family Breakdown in New Zealand' commissioned by Family First NZ and prepared by the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER) estimated that the fiscal cost to the NZ taxpayer of family breakdown and decreasing marriage rates is at least \$1 billion per year and has cost approximately

\$8 billion over the past decade. The study shows that the decline of marriage, NZ's high teenage fertility rate, and our rate of solo parenthood is not just a moral or social concern but should also be a concern of government and policymakers. The focus has been on 'child poverty' but this misses the real issue – that is, poverty amongst families with children, and the way that divorce, unwed child-bearing, teenage pregnancy and sole parenting contribute to that poverty. For example, sole parents have the lowest average living standards of all economic family unit types.

+ *Family Research Council May 27, 2011*

+ *Family First NZ*

### **New Bill Seeks to Stop Sharia Court Encroachments**

On 7 June 2011, a bill designed to stop Muslim Sharia law courts from falsely claiming legal jurisdiction over criminal or family law in England and Wales was introduced in Great Britain's House of Lords by Baroness Cox. The bill is additionally supported by The Christian Institute and the National Secular Society.

Under the Bill, it will become a crime punishable by up to five years in prison to falsely claim legal jurisdiction over criminal or family law.

The Bill makes clear that laws against sex discrimination apply to arbitration tribunals, firmly outlawing the Sharia practice of treating a woman's testimony as being worth half that of a man's.

+ *The Christian Institute, info@christian.org.uk*

+ *National Secular Society, enquiries@secularism.org.uk*

### **Presbyterian Hospital in Australia Bans Abortion**

A 6 July 2011 article in The Chronicle titled 'St Andrew's Bans Abortion' reports that at the 29 June 2011 meeting of the newly constituted board of St Andrews Toowoomba Hospital (SATH) in Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia, a new policy was voted upon affirmatively that virtually bans abortions at the hospital. The only possible exception is '...where two specialist gynaecologists, in consultation with the medical director, deem that termination of a pregnancy is necessary to prevent life-

threatening injury to the mother, and that the threat of injury is so imminent as to require intervention prior to the age of foetal viability....'

SATH is a ministry of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland (PCQ). Two weeks ago, the PCQ dismissed the SATH board chairman and eight other governors for fear that the board was attempting to overturn PCQ influence on running SATH.

Subsequent to the 29 June 2011 SATH board meeting, a public letter from four Toowoomba obstetricians was published stating that women seeking abortions at SATH '...will be subjected to a significant increase in pain and stress by forcing them to seek treatment outside the Toowoomba private hospital system...

We deeply regret the withdrawal of this essential service, however, we regard this as a minor issue when compared with the outrageous power abuse exercised by the [PCQ] when they dismissed the board of governors and replaced them with a carefully chosen group which they trust will obey their demands to sign a letter of compliance with church dogma.'

+ *The Chronicle, news@thechronicle.com.au*

+ *Presbyterian Church of Queensland, 35 Amelia Street, Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia 4006, 07-3251-4100, Fax: 07-3852-1564.*

+ *St. Andrews Toowoomba Hospital, minister@rest.org.au*

### **Boko Haram Strikes in Nigeria**

Boko Haram, 'the Nigerian Taliban', formalised its links with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in mid-June 2010. Consequently terror has escalated. On 16 June 2011, Boko Haram perpetrated Nigeria's first ever suicide bombing, attacking the Police Headquarters in the capital Abuja, killing eight. Whilst some church bombing plots have been foiled, four Christians died when militants bombed the All Christian Fellowship Mission in Selija, Niger State, 40km from Abuja, on Sunday 10 July. Boko Haram is reportedly planning a massive terror campaign to coincide with the 31 July anniversary of the death in custody of its founder-leader Sheikh Mohammed Yusuf. It has warned Muslims to avoid Christians, police and government employees, declaring

these all to be 'infidels... marked for elimination'. Please pray that God will protect his people.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | RLPB 116 | Wed 13 Jul 2011*

### **The illusion of limiting legalized euthanasia**

So-called safeguards to limit the practice of legalized euthanasia don't work, a recent paper suggests. According to a recent article published in Current Oncology by Dr. José Pereira, Medical Chief of Palliative Care at Bruyère Continuing Care in Ottawa, safeguards are routinely ignored and/or abused. His review of the non-prosecuted violations of safeguards in the Netherlands, Belgium and the state of Oregon show that including safeguards in assisted suicide legislation is little more than drawing lines in the sand.

+ *By Derek Miedema, Researcher, Institute of Marriage and Family Canada – as quoted by Family First NZ*

### **Discrimination and Genocide Rock Sudan**

South Sudan seceded from the north on 9 July 2011. Only four days later, Sudan's parliament in Khartoum passed a law that stripped citizenship from over a million South Sudanese who live in the north. Those predominantly Christian Southerners are also losing their jobs and rights. President El-Bashir has already stated he will amend the constitution, making Islam the state religion, Islamic Sharia the main source of law and Arabic the official language. Meanwhile, the Satellite Sentinel Project has revealed visual evidence of three mass graves capable of holding many thousands of corpses, adjoining the Episcopal Church of Sudan compound in Kadugli, South Kordofan. Many thousands of African, predominantly Christian Nuba are believed to be buried there, victims of the new Nuba Genocide. Please pray for Sudan and its Christians.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | RLPB 117 | Wed 20 Jul 2011*

# Children under the Banner

## Beatitudes

Read chapter five of Matthew and match those who are blessed with their blessing. Draw a line from the first column to the blessing in the second column.



*From: 'Search and Solve: Bible Activity Sheet', by Betty De Vries, [Illustrated by Donna Greenlee]*

### Blessed are

- poor in spirit
- persecuted because of righteousness
- merciful
- meek
- pure in heart
- those who hunger and thirst for righteousness
- those who mourn
- peacemakers

### for they (theirs is)

- will be filled
- the kingdom of heaven
- will be called sons of God
- the kingdom of heaven
- will inherit the earth
- will be comforted
- will be shown mercy
- will see God

# Prescribed Search / Youth Work

## AUGUST 2011

### SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 3 and 6)

#### JUDGES chapter 11

1. What was Jephthah's question to the elders of Gilead when they asked him to be their captain?

What did the elders reply? (2 verses)

2. Where did Jephthah speak all his words?

3. What had happened to Sihon king of the Amorites because he would not let Israel pass through his land on their way from Egypt?

4. What was the vow that Jephthah made to the Lord? (2 verses)

5. Who came out to meet Jephthah on his return?

#### chapter 12

6. Of what did the men of Ephraim complain to Jephthah, and what was his reply? (3 verses)

7. What was the word used to distinguish between the Gileadites and the Ephraimites?

8. Name the three judges that followed Jephthah. How long did each judge Israel?

## JUNIOR

#### JUDGES chapter 13

1. For how long were the children of Israel delivered into the hand of the Philistines?

2. Why was no razor to come on the head of Manoah's son?

3. How did the angel ascend to heaven?

4. What did Manoah and his wife call their son?

Please send the answers to:  
Mrs I Steel  
PO Box 942  
Epping NSW 1710  
Or email to: [iesteel@gmail.com](mailto:iesteel@gmail.com)

# Men under the Banner

## The Vital Place of a Men's Prayer Breakfast

*Sjirk Bajema*

It is generally accepted that the book of Acts is more descriptive than prescriptive – so it more or less tells us what happened rather than what should happen. It does, however, through the picture of life in the early Church, give us a model for today. Particularly in its opening chapters, there is flesh put on the bones of the principles we find in the apostolic letters.

Of those opening chapters in Acts, what is helpful for us in this subject are the verses 42 till 47 of Acts chapter 2. There we see the primitive New Testament Church in action.

When we look at verse 42 in that passage, we see what we would especially relate to Christian public worship. The apostle's teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer, are a clear outline of what happens in church on the Lord's Day. This equivocates to preaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer, in our worship services.

But let's now put verse 42 in the wider context of the verses 42 till 47. Here we see something which filled up their lives every day and in every way. They were constantly involved in fellowship.

We need to make a condition in connection with this, however; for that situation was temporary. Many of those newly converted had to leave very soon to go back to their homes – which could be anywhere throughout Asia Minor, northern Africa, or even Greece and Italy! (Acts 2:9-11 tells us there were quite a number from all over the known world then, each hearing their own regional languages.) So this was a special time to be fully trained and encouraged in the faith – a situation that would never again be seen in the history of the Church. It is as unrepeatable as Christ's birth, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection.

### The Call To Be Built Up Together

Despite that, though, you cannot get away from realising that what is happening here is so important that it ought to be filling up our lives when-

ever possible. If it meant selling up all you had so that no one went without, it was certainly serious stuff!

So this is not something that can be reduced to only an hour on Sunday. This is something which so grips you that wherever and whenever you can, you build yourself up with it. We show that with our own personal devotions. Every day we open up God's Word, seeking God's blessing upon it, and mediate on it. We follow that up with our spouses and our children as we have times of family worship.

Then there are those occasions every week or fortnight when we open up God's Word in our Bible Studies, or Mid-Week Prayer meetings as some congregations call them. These can vary from something almost like a Sunday worship service in church itself to sitting in a member's lounge in a study together. Aside from these regular times there would also be, I trust, times of irregular fellowship. When we casually visit one another we speak of our blessings in the faith and causes for thanksgiving.

### The Call To Be Men Training Together

So far so good. But here we come to an area where it can seem there isn't any definite scripture injunction or example to follow. You see, as I am addressing the vital place of a men's prayer breakfast.

Where is something like this happening in the Bible? While there are commands regarding the importance of studying God's Word together, of fellowshiping together, and of prayer together, where are we told that it is good for men to gather in their own group together?

Looking across Christendom today we could well gather that men fellowshiping together is not such a big deal. Very few churches have this fellowship and those that do seem to have so few of their men join in it. At least when you compare it with their ladies groups! The womenfolk do show us up, don't they?

Well, we could say that our Lord took time out to be with His disciples and

that they were a group of men together. You would have to add that that was a special time and place and one that cannot be repeated in church history.

But still, there is something in it. They were all men. After all. It was not a mixed gender leadership team Jesus picked. He meant there to be men in the leadership of the Church. This is the real reason for the need of men's fellowship. While it can be a helpful time of being encouraged in the faith it must first of all be a looking to being encouraged in present service, and being prepared for future service, for the Lord.

Think of 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3. What is the first attribute for being a leader in the Church of Christ? It is the desire within you to want to be an elder.

That's the noble thing! (1)

How many of us haven't been encouraged by this same motivation in the godly men of the past? Whether we knew them personally, or we read of them in books and magazines, how much didn't their looking to the Lord inspire us to do the same? It is a spirit reflected in the famous quote from Richard Baxter, the puritan, 'I preach, as if I ne'er should preach again; And, as a dying man, to dying men.'

Oh that we could have such a spirit! And yet we may – exactly through the right encouragement and company. For those divines of the past were themselves mentored by others. I have been and so have you! Or have you? Can you think of a positive mature godly man's influence in your life?

John Paton, the Presbyterian missionary to the New Hebrides, never forgot his father's fervent pleading with the Lord in his private prayers. In his room next door, John heard it all. And how much didn't that influence his all!

Are you in such a place, Christian man? You know you must be! So why don't we see exactly there the vital place of a men's prayer breakfast, or indeed any time when Christian men can gather for teaching

and prayer?

**The Call To Look To The Lord Together**

This brings in what we see of our brothers on such an occasion. When we openly share of our joys and struggles, of our difficulties and blessing, aren't we all helped to look to the Lord? But this must be kept within that framework of looking to the Lord. There can be none of man in it but, rather, time and again we must be refocused on the Lord through His Word. This is why the 'testimony' type of men's prayer breakfast must be avoided. The only story that counts is His Story!

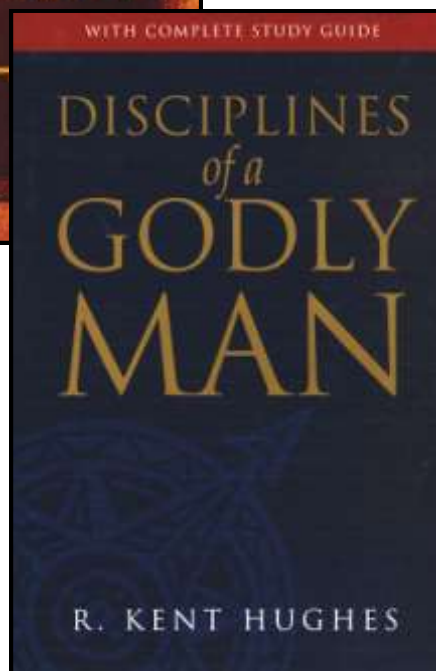
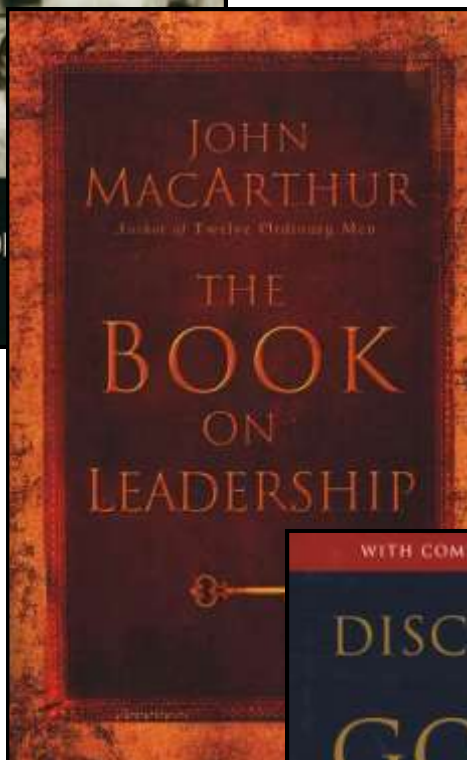
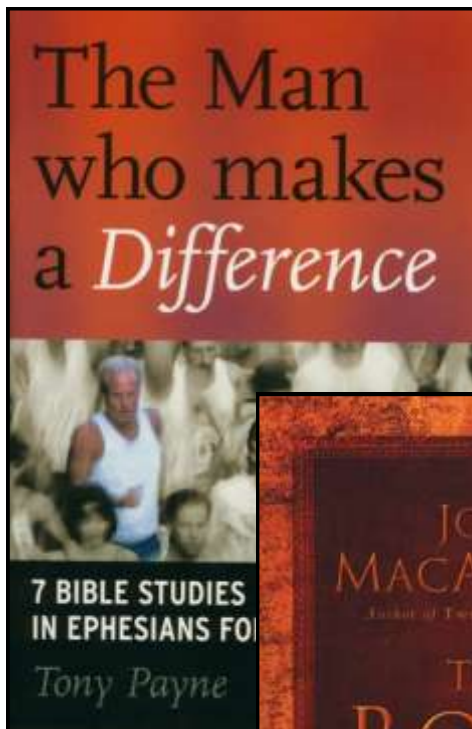
This is why it is good to have a regular biblically based series of studies at your Men's Breakfast. In Narre Warren we have been blessed through the Matthias Media's 'The Man who makes A Difference' study booklet, based on Ephesians. This is presently being followed up with a study of the book by John MacArthur, 'The Book on Leadership', that is based on the apostle Paul – in particular chapters 27 and 28 of the book of Acts, together with relevant passages from the apostle's letters. There are many other studies also, whether in booklet form, DVD, or otherwise.

It is to be encouraged that men come prepared for these studies – that is a useful discipline in itself – but for men simply to come is something to be encouraged.

**The Call To Keep Coming Together**

Now one must note the need for the men to keep coming together. There is a spirit in our pragmatic age of 'counting heads' and looking to who

is not there. Some men in a congregation may openly say that it's not worth it if there are only a few coming. That is not the Holy Spirit at work. Rather, the Lord is pleased to grant His blessing when there is only two or three together (cf. Matt.18:20). As He said to Samuel when he was looking at Jesse's sons in term of a future king for Israel, and Samuel was rather taken by the standing and strength of the oldest son, "The LORD does not



look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart (1 Sam.16:7).” When there are not men meeting together in prayer and study that congregation suffers its lack. A distinct spiritual focus is lost.

**The Call To Be Humble Together**

Now let's turn to further on to 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy. Look at the passage consisting of the verses 3 till 10 of chapter 6. Read it and reflect on it. What struck you about this section? Did you wonder how it could possibly fit in with what we've just spoken of? Well, it is an exposition of what happens when one goes off the rails, biblically speaking. And how does one come into the position of teaching false doctrines that don't agree with the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ? Well, bad influence has been a major factor in this. There hasn't been positive biblical mentoring going on. Or if there has been, it is overshadowed by quite a negative anti-biblical message. This is an influence which promotes self-love. Look through the characteristics in verse 4 and 5. There we find the one who is not humble under the Lord described as 'conceited, and understands nothing'; having 'an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words' that result in 'envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions.' Further, there is the 'constant friction between men of corrupt mind' – those who are 'robbed of the truth,' who think 'that godliness is a means to financial gain.'

These show us people who are full of themselves and so have no room for the Lord. One enterprising motivational speaker used this same spirit to write a book, 'Sin to Win', in which he spelled out how the seven deadly sins could prove to be your great business break-through! People like this in the Church, though, cannot work co-operatively with fellow believers.

Indeed, their actions show up the

emptiness of their faith. They are those who incessantly raise protests over the most minute details of the church budget while themselves contributing next to nothing in the offering bag on Sunday. There is nothing of the Holy Spirit in this.

This is what the verses 6 till 8 detail for us, because Christian commitment is being humble under the Lord. Thus 'the love of money' describes someone who is looking after 'No. 1' – and that one is not the Lord! Note this is 'the love of money', not the money itself. This is making material things your god, which, of course, means it's all about you! That's why the apostle pleads for us not to wander from the faith, and not to pierce ourselves with many griefs. Rather, we must have true contentment. This comes through the right relationship with the Lord and thus being involved meaningfully in the life and fellowship of Christ's people.

For Christian men, it means being open to being the leaders Christ wants them to be. It's a special part of church life. You notice it when it's not there. Because soon enough, the men are not in that church any more. (2) It reminds me of an occasion when a minister was speaking with several ladies visiting from the Netherlands. They belonged to a church where there were women ordained in all the offices of the church. And they had



*The participants at the June 2011 Ulverstone Men's Prayer Breakfast*

just told this minister that they themselves had had to become elders because there were no men willing to do it. Then they asked him what he would do if faced with such a situation. I mean, he could only endorse it as it meant the church could continue, wouldn't he? The minister replied quite bluntly: 'I would close the church! It's not a Church any more. Where there are no men to lead in church, it cannot be a

Church any more!' Stand up, man! Be busy doing what counts for eternity – not for your bank balance or personal pleasure today! And then you will prepare the way for the Church to be what the Lord intends her to be. You don't think He got it wrong – do you?

*If you have found this article useful and would like to take it up with a Men's Fellowship Group there are discussion questions available from the author. Please feel free to contact me on [sjirkb@gmail.com](mailto:sjirkb@gmail.com) to receive a copy.*



*The participants at the July 2011 Narre Warren Men's Study Breakfast*

**Footnotes:**

- 1- The mentoring of younger women by older women in Titus 2:4 could indicate that the same is happening between younger and older men in the same chapter.
- 2- All of 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy, and Titus, could be seen as the apostle's mentoring of his younger colleagues. It is especially in the verses after 6:3-10 that Paul's instructions to Timothy culminate with the charge to fight the good fight of the faith.